

Foundry of the First Flame

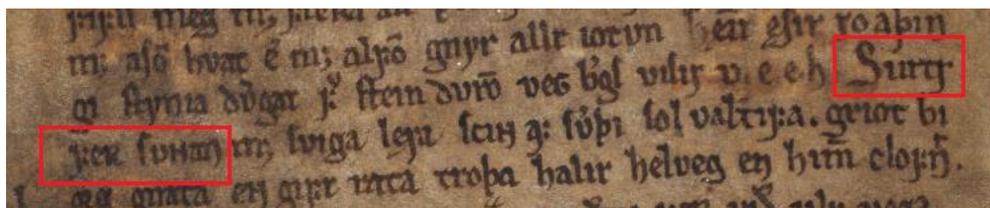
The primordial elements of old northern tales hold crucial components and kernels of truth that, if we are looking deeper into the esoteric side of things, will allow some insight into why things are ordered the way they are in mythology. I have always found it crucial to study origins, and look upon mythic cosmology as a way to discern the cultural ideas of where certain elements arise from. A glimpse into how these speakers of sagas reckoned the world around them, and how we should as well.

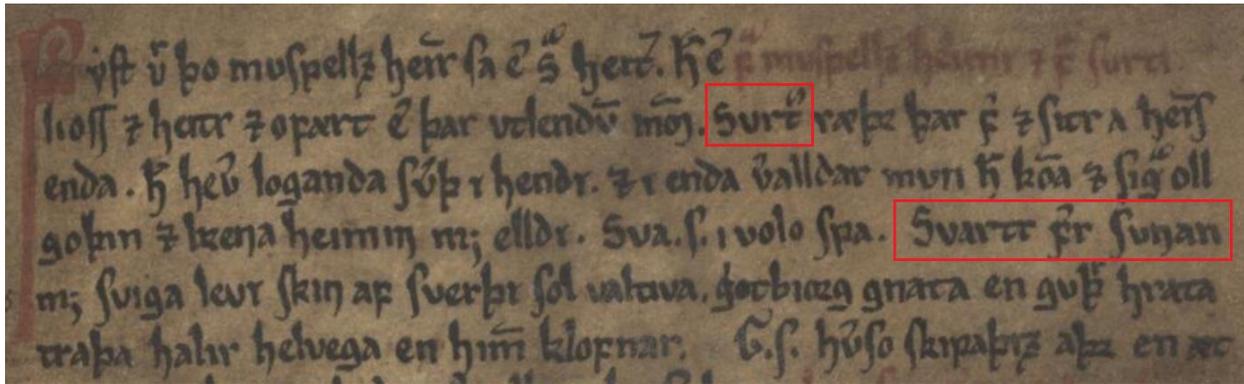
Many know of the world Muspellheimr, which is home to the being known as Surtr, the fated destroyer of many realms. This place, according to Gylfaginning 7, was the first world: *fyst var þó múspellshheimr, sá er svá heitir*. Being situated towards the southern part of the Ginnungagap, it is one of interest for me based on the relative obscurity in the myths. The author states that: *ljóss ok heitr ok ófórt er þar útlendum mǫnnum – bright/shining and hot and unfared by outlandish men*.

This place was one of fire, light and life before the advent of Ýmir, the supposed first-being. Surtr, being the actual first form of life is characterized by his destructive aspects. Upon reviewing some of the oldest forms of the texts codices Regius and Upsaliensis, it seems to me that Surtr, or Svtr is just a scribal abbreviation of Svartr – *swarth or darkness*. The reason I see it in this vein, is because in Regius the word is on the tail end of the left-hand page and abbreviation seems to have been done to save space on vellum pages. Upsaliensis took a similar route and has the words as Svrt^s as an abbreviation.

There is another curious part between the two manuscripts, is the excerpt from Vǫluspá 52 which is commonly transliterated as *svrtr ferr sunnan* in Codex Regius, follows this same method of abbreviation. In Upsaliensis, this is changed to *svartr fr svnan*. The translation is *the swarth/darkness fares from the south*. This gives credence to his more destructive form, as this hue was looked upon with both distrust and disgust. Later beings out of the secondary world of Niflheimr and subsequently the realms of Helheimr and Niflhel were also indicated to be of this complexion.

Codex Regius – page 4.





While the first realm is gleaming with an ancient light, he is the large shadow that is cast and lingers at the edge. The texts state: *Surtr ræðr þar fyrir ok sitr á heimsenda. Hann hefir loganda sverð í hendi, ok í enda veraldar mun hann koma ok sigra öll goðin ok brenna heiminn með eldi* – *The swarth/darkness advises there fore and sits at the end of the home. He has a blazing sword in hand, and in the end of man's age, shall he come and conquer all the gods and burn the home with fire.* This figure is not indicated to be a Jötunn directly in the texts, nor does he have typical iconography associated with the Þursar lines aside from being swarthy, though he does fight on the side of these figures at Ragnarök. He is in noted in Nafnaþulur chapter 9 of the first list of Jötnar, so it is a wonder whether or not he is just denoted as such by a later amendment, or just of a completely different line of forms than the ones descending from Ýmir. Some have suggested that he is an antedated being.

Further, if we take into account the word *veraldar* being *man-age* or *the age of man*, as I have in my translation, there is a sense that the darkness is not an *ender of worlds* but an *ender of ages*. This revolves more around how time and ages pass, and the function of this darkness was likely to cleave failing ones. In this instance, he ends the age of mankind specifically, which is why humans are hidden in *hoddmímis holt*, the *wood of hoarded-memory* during the *svrtalogi* or *svartalogi* – *the dark fire*.

Since the function of this living darkness personified by Svartr-Surtr is to end certain ages, and his origin is difficult to ascertain, it seems likely that the living darkness existed from another age or time which was previously destroyed and gave way to the windless stale skies above the primordial ocean, being devoid of all growth. This would also indicate there were alternate cycles of time, where the early beings in creation emerge from as leftover remnants; the recycling and renewing of forms.

To this point, the name of the realm Muspellheimr seems to have an association with time. Some have a normalized form of the term as Múspellzheimr, but there does not seem to be any indication outside of the Old High German word *mūdspellī* and *mutspellī*. It has been discussed by other scholars, that this may have had an influence from the Latin *mundus*, meaning *world*. Since the terminology comes from an alliterative eschatological poem, it may actually be a word that the various authors of northern tales took. A key thing of note, is that the diacritic in *mūdspellī* traditionally indicates a nasal consonant after the initial letter. This would reveal a word such as *mundspillī* or *muntspillī*. Such words in Icelandic deal with *human hands* or *a moment in time* or *a measure of time*, as the Cleasby-Vígfusson dictionary details. I personally view the hands like those on a clock. The term *spilla*, has a general meaning of *destruction* in Icelandic. But the connotation has more to do with a *corrupting force or violating action*, judging by it's use in actions such as *rape*. This gives an entirely new essence to the character of the realm, and its inhabitants, the *Muspells synir*.

I would redefine the terms as *Mundspellheimr*, and *Mundspells synir*, giving a different understanding to the mythos of what these forms represent. The *home of the time-destroyers*, or *the sons of the time destroyers*. These are sons and tribe of the living darkness that dwells within the primordial home of fire that lie in wait to bring an end to any decadent æon or age. Near the end of one of these cycles, these forms and forces will take up arms and violate that age of men and all inhabitants – cleansing all spaces to make way for the new life to emerge once again. An additional reasoning, is that the Faroese word *spell* is defined as being a sort of *shame*. This would indicate that the forms of this place are *time-shamed*, or likewise *ashamed of time and thus creation*. Time, and creation is an undesired thing to them.

Svartr-Surtr is not said to be vanquished at Ragnarøk. He goes into battle with Freyr, and after a long battle – *the lord is killed by the darkness*. Despite being such a destructive force, the role after the cataclysm seems to be one of good intention and renewal. Gylfaginning 31 states: *Margar eru vistir góðar ok margar illar. Bezt er at vera á Gimlé meðr Surti – Many are there good provisions and many that are bad. The best being on the fire-shelter with the darkness*. The term *Gimlé* has multiple potential definitions; the first being a gem-roof, based on the definitions of the words *gim*, being a *gemstone* and *hlé*, which means *a shelter* or a *roof* which gives protection specifically from *wind*. The second form, is a *fire-scythe*, with *gim* additionally being a poetic term for *fire*, and *lé* being a scythe.

The position of Svartr-Surtr here as a holder of the best heaven is interesting, as this seems very similar in form to the function of Saturn/Krónos as the steward of Elysium as an afterlife in the Roman-Hellenistic culture. The scythe is what predominantly indicates this connection, as well as the later function of time that he held – eventually melding into a sort of Father Time figure.

His first weapon is the scythe which is indicated in the Völuspá 52 stanza as *sviga lævi* – the *switch/twig-bane*. Some authors indicate the bane of branches as being fire, which correspond to the dark fire he wields. I would say that the word judging the use of the words *svigi* and *svigna* as a *thing that bows* and technically the blade of a scythe bows. Further, the dative case of *lævi* makes the term into an objective form. What this means, is that it indicates more of a *craft*, or a *skill*. Redefining this term to *bowing-craft* or *switch-craft*. What this exactly means, seems to have to do with the *cutting down of a thing*. Id est, the age, men and the gods.

His second weapon is *skínn af sverði sól valtíva* – *the sword shining of the dead gods' sun*. Based on the mention of two distinct objects, I do not think these are the same weapons as many have postulated. The *sól valtíva*, the sun of the dead gods shows that the gods at one point had governance over the sun after it's filtering from the first world. Since Óðinn fashioned the sun after the murder of Ýmir, and *síur ór múspellsheimi* – *filtered it from the home of the time destroyers*. This indicates that the sun is of a more primordial foundation, and was essentially ordered into existence, not created. It was wrested from it's ancient place and reformed.

The stars were also the result of this fixation- *sétt í mitt ginnungagap ofan ok neðan á himininn at lýsa jörðina. Þeir gáfu staði þllum eldingum. Þaðan af voru dógr greind ok ára tal.* – *set in the middle and over the great-young gap, and neath the heavens to light the earth. They gave stead to all the fires. By that, were days reckoned, and years/hours tallied.*

Based on the aversion to time implied by the name of both the realm and it's dark forms, we can only assume this is the most offensive part of creation and the reason why the ancient forms seek an apocatastasis; to unorder the ordered, returning the prima materia that was taken back to its original seat by ekpyrosis. This is the fundamental force represented by Svartr-Surtr and Mundspellheimr.

Those that are cut down like branches by the dark blazing scythe, take shelter under an ancient sky away from the winds of creation, gleaming with forgotten stars and gem-like fires. The sun and stars were once forged from the first fires left over from no-time. In forgotten times the darkness forged the final weapons from the first fires.